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SUBJECT: VATICAN-NORTH KOREA CONTACTS ON HOLD PENDING
OUTCOME OF SIX-PARTY TALKS

REF: A. A) VATICAN 3436

[1](#)B. B) 02 VATICAN 5461

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR JIM NICHOLSON. REASONS: 1.5 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) THE HOLY SEE'S OFFICE DIRECTOR FOR NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA, MONSIGNOR LUIS MONTEMAYOR, TOLD DCM NOVEMBER 18 THAT THE VATICAN'S PERIODIC SENIOR LEVEL CONTACTS WITH PYONGYANG WERE IN SUSPENSION PENDING THE RESULTS OF THE SIX-PARTY TALKS ON NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR ARMS PROGRAM. THE HOLY SEE HOPED THAT AN EVENTUAL AGREEMENT WITH NORTH KOREA VIA THE GROUP OF SIX PROCESS WOULD CREATE AN OPENING FOR A RESUMPTION OF CONTACTS WITH THE DPRK. IN PAST CONTACTS, THE HOLY SEE HAS FOCUSED NARROWLY ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND HUMANITARIAN RELIEF WORK THROUGH CARITAS, BOTH AIMED AT CREATING A SMALL SPACE FOR THE GROWTH OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP THAT COULD EVENTUALLY HAVE A SPIN OFF ON OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS.

FEAR OF CHURCH DESPITE LACK OF FAITHFUL

[1](#)2. (C) MONTEMAYOR EMPHASIZED THAT THE DPRK GOVERNMENT REMAINED WARY OF THE VATICAN, EVEN THOUGH THE CHURCH PRESENCE OVER TIME AND THROUGH PERSECUTION HAD BECOME VIRTUALLY NONEXISTENT IN NORTH KOREA. THE NORTH KOREANS FEAR THE U.S. MOST OF ALL, MONTEMAYOR OBSERVED, BUT THEY ARE ALSO TERRIFIED OF THE POTENTIAL INFLUENCE OF RELIGION -- AND OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN PARTICULAR WHICH CONTINUES TO GROW RAPIDLY IN SOUTH KOREA.

[1](#)3. (C) MONTEMAYOR POINTED OUT THAT THERE WAS NO ECCLESIASTICAL STRUCTURE IN NORTH KOREA, EVEN THOUGH THERE MAY BE SCATTERED BAPTIZED CATHOLICS STILL LIVING. THE HOLY SEE IS NOT AWARE OF ANY LIVING CLERGY MEMBERS IN THE COUNTRY, AND NOTES THAT THE FATE OF THE LAST BISHOP OF PYONGYANG, HONG YONG-HO HAS REMAINED A MYSTERY SINCE 1962. HE IS STILL KEPT IN THE VATICAN BOOKS AS THE BISHOP, WITH A NOTE THAT HIS WHEREABOUTS ARE UNKNOWN. WHEN THE VATICAN HAS ASKED ABOUT INDIVIDUAL CLERGY MEMBERS, THE DPRK GOVERNMENT HAS TOLD THE VATICAN THAT ALL THE CATHOLICS WERE KILLED BY AMERICAN BOMBING DURING THE WAR, WHICH THEY INSIST TARGETED CHURCHES. IN FACT, MONTEMAYOR NOTED, MANY NORTH KOREAN CATHOLICS FLED TO THE SOUTH DURING THE KOREAN WAR, AND THERE IS STILL A PRESENCE OF NORTH KOREAN CATHOLICS THERE. THIS FACTOR, AND THE STRENGTH OF THE SOUTH KOREAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, IS ENOUGH TO PRESENT A THREAT TO THE PARANOID PYONGYANG GOVERNMENT, WHICH HAS RESISTED VATICAN EFFORTS TO REESTABLISH ANY ECCLESIASTICAL STRUCTURE.

POSITIONING FOR THE FUTURE

[1](#)4. (C) AS IT NOW STANDS, THE ARCHBISHOP OF SEOUL SERVES AS APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR FOR PYONGYANG. THIS IRRITATES THE NORTH KOREANS, WHO GRATE AT THE IDEA OF BEING IN ANY WAY SUBORDINATED TO AN ORGANIZATION IN SEOUL. TO AVOID THIS 'IGNOMINY' THE HOLY SEE HAS OFFERED TO ESTABLISH A BISHOP FOR PYONGYANG WITH HIS OWN STRUCTURE, BUT THE NORTH KOREANS HAVE YET TO TAKE THE BAIT. IF ANY MODEST OPENING COULD BE ACHIEVED IN NORTH KOREA, THE HOLY SEE WOULD BE VERY WELL POSITIONED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT, DRAWING ON THEIR STRONG AND GROWING CHURCH STRUCTURE IN SOUTH KOREA. AS MONTEMAYOR OBSERVED WITH A WRY SMILE, "THIS IS ONE CASE WHERE WE HAVE PRIESTS IN ABUNDANCE -- AND THEY SPEAK THE LANGUAGE."

[1](#)5. (C) MONTEMAYOR SAID THAT HE AND VATICAN DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER MONSIGNOR PIETRO PAROLIN WOULD LIKELY RESUME CONTACTS NEXT YEAR - IDEALLY AFTER A AGREEMENT HAD BEEN ACHIEVED LEADING TO THE DISMANTLEMENT OF NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAMS. PAROLIN'S PREDECESSOR, ARCHBISHOP MIGLIORE, VISITED PYONGYANG FIVE TIMES TO KEEP A LINE OF COMMUNICATION OPEN. AT THE SAME TIME, MONTEMAYOR ACKNOWLEDGED THE VATICAN'S DIFFICULTIES IN TRYING TO OPEN UP SPACE FOR RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN THE REPRESSIVE REGIME. FOR THE TIME BEING, THEY WOULD CONTINUE TO PROVIDE SUBSTANTIAL

AID TO THROUGH CARITAS INTERNATIONAL AND AFFILIATED CHARITIES, WHILE ENSURING THIS AID WOULD NOT BE FUNNELED TO THE DPRK GOVERNMENT OR MILITARY (REF. A). IN ADDITION, THE HOLY SEE CONTINUES TO TRY TO ENCOURAGE PERSONAL CONTACT BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH TO THE LIMITED EXTENT POSSIBLE.

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